

Are Dual Enrollment Classes in the Best Interest of Our Students?

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from *Inquiry*, Volume 8, Number 1, Spring 2003

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Abstract

Dual enrollment classes offer advantages to colleges and students alike.

Dual enrollment programs have been offered formally in Virginia since 1988 and have been embraced by both parents and students. While dual enrollment courses offer many advantages to our students, the advantages to our colleges are significant as well. Dual credit enrollment provides many advantages:

- Provides more challenging opportunities for high school students that can help address lack of student motivation and boredom;
- Provides for a wider range of high school courses, which is of particular benefit for rural schools since courses might not be available otherwise unless dual credit is offered;
- Saves students time by reducing the time needed for completion of a college degree. Currently, most students take longer than four years to earn a baccalaureate degree and most students take longer than two years to complete an associate's degree. By getting a jump-start with dual enrollment classes, students have a better chance of finishing by what is commonly considered "on-time";
- Saves students money. With affordable tuition and convenient locations, students can slash college costs by taking dual enrollment courses;
- Transfer area courses are transferable to most senior colleges and universities as long as a grade of "C" or better is earned;
- Students know how they are progressing in courses by grades earned on tests throughout the semester versus hoping to pass a test at the end term as in Advanced Placement (AP) courses;
- Dual enrollment classes are taught by faculty who meet the teaching standards set by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, often not the case with AP courses;
- Communication between high schools and community colleges is improved as a result of the partnerships built on the dual enrollment relationships. Dual enrollment partnerships help build a foundation that leads to other partnerships;
- Dual enrollment courses help eliminate the unnecessary duplication of courses for students who take high school courses similar to those required in college. For example, when I took a course titled "Advanced Math" in high school, it covered the same material as our Math 163 course. However, the college that I attended didn't recognize the course for credit, so I had to enroll in a college algebra course even though I had already mastered the course work, a waste of time and money.

The biggest concern that I hear about dual credit classes, both by our faculty and senior colleges, is whether dual credit classes are in fact being taught at a true college level. The integrity of dual credit classes hinges on the fact that they are taught at the “college level” with rigorous grading. Dual credit classes must be regularly assessed just as our other classes need to be assessed, and the standards of quality must be constantly guarded. At PDCCC, many safeguards assure quality in our dual enrollment classes:

- Analyzing competencies completed by dual credit students and students in regular classes ensures that dual enrollment students complete the same number of competencies as on-campus students;
- Course outlines are approved by Dean’s Council/President;
- Textbooks used are to be either the same as on-campus or must be approved by the Dean’s Council;
- Copies of final exams are required to be submitted to the Dean’s Council prior to being administered;
- Dual enrollment faculty members are evaluated in the same way as on-campus adjunct faculty. They are observed a minimum of one time each semester;
- Full-time faculty are given the responsibility of working with their dual enrollment counterparts to ensure consistency of the curriculum;
- Division chairs and program heads are responsible for ensuring that the syllabus, exams, etc. for each course are equivalent to the on-campus course;
- Department faculty also review syllabi and exams; and
- Performance at transfer institutions is tracked.

Of the strategies just listed, none is more important than the inclusion of dual enrollment faculty as a part of our community of scholars where intellectual exchanges take place between like discipline faculty. Such discipline exchanges can effectively address matters of academic integrity in ways not possible through other methods. Moreover, it behooves high school and college faculty alike to engage in discussion of discipline matters whether dual enrollment classes are part of the landscape or not.

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